

Disrupted Realism

January 5th – February 24th 2018

Disrupted Realism

Curated by John Seed

January 5th – February 24th 2018

STANEK GALLERY

242 North 3rd Street Philadelphia PA 19106

215 - 908 - 3277

www.stanekgallery.com

*“A work of art which did not begin in emotion
is not art.”*

- Paul Cezanne

Disrupted Realism isn't exactly a style and it may not even be a tendency. It is perhaps best described as an overlapping set of developments in painting that crosses international borders and stylistic boundaries. This exhibition is best understood as a sampling, rather than a cross section, of works by diverse artists who share a common motivation: they are interested in re-ordering the appearances of their subjects as a way of entering them and endowing them with varied intuitive and personal meanings and associations.

Sparked by diverse concerns including the evocation of memories, reflections on personal experience, an interest in painterly improvisation and/or the relationship of painting to photographic, cinematic and digital images, each artist has found a way to re-invent their relationship to the real. Their probing and inventive art says something about how they feel as individuals and about the possibilities of painting in an era when realism, once a scarce and highly prized commodity produced by highly trained and skilled artists, has become something that anyone with a smartphone can produce and disseminate in seconds.

It is entirely possible that when future art historians look back at the phenomenon of *Disrupted Realism* they will see a group of artists who used painting to represent inner truths during a time when easy mechanical realism was so often used in the service of lies.

In the middle of the 19th century, when the first commercially produced photographs began to appear, they were blurry. In fact, the earliest photograph to include people “Boulevard du Temple,” by Louis Daguerre shows only two very soft, shadowy figures: a boot polisher and his customer. The other figures who peopled the boulevard have vanished, since they were walking and the camera was not quick enough to capture their images. In the decades that followed, exposures got shorter, lenses got better and crisp, and sharp photographs of people (and other subjects) became commonplace and inexpensive. A revolution in realism was in the offing.

For the first time in history, a mechanical device, the camera, could do what skilled artists had been struggling and striving to do for centuries: record the world and its inhabitants with precision. At first, it must have seemed that the camera was going to put painters out of business. Photography interrupted the tradition of painting and threw its traditional role and purpose into question. One of the most important questions its emergence raised: Why should an artist bother to spend a lifetime understanding form, perspective and light when a camera can record and depict those things mechanically? It was a tough question then and it remains a tough question now. We all know that the answer for some modern artists, Warhol for example, was to toss in the towel.

Of course, photography did not wipe out the tradition of painting. In many important respects photography became a helpful tool for painters. As the 19th century rolled into the 20th, Impressionist artists like Degas gleaned new ideas about composition and focus from photography and Corot made prints called cliché verres, essentially drawings printed in a darkroom. Academic artists, including Jean-Léon Gérôme, used photography as direct source material, moving towards what we now know as Photorealism. But the artists who took the most radical course of action, including Cezanne and the Cubists who followed him, realized that the most dynamic course of action was to steal the idea of multiple points of view and move away from mimesis towards subjectivity and feeling.

Feeling had always been there in painting - try and imagine a Rembrandt without it. What Cezanne in particular comprehended was that painting now had the potential to become a vehicle for sensory input (and human emotion) in a way photography, its newborn frenemy, could not match. "Art is a personal apperception," he once stated, "which I embody in sensations and which I ask the understanding to organize into a painting." At the risk of over-simplifying, the history of modern art after Cezanne would not have been possible without the model of heroic individualism and subjectivity that he provided. Cezanne was the anti-camera: profoundly human and always ready to ask the question, "Is this what I see?" rather than resorting to mimesis. Cezanne, who acknowledged the “petit sensation” of each brushstroke, is the great-grandfather of *Disrupted Realism*.

In the 21st century, realism is still with us. Often dismissed or denigrated by mainstream critics being commonly described (unfairly) as a “conservative” style. Despite the misconception, the skill supporting realism is making a comeback in ateliers and some schools. Although the artists who knock themselves out attaining it often find themselves knocked down a peg by critics or reduced to earning \$20 per hour making paintings for Jeff Koons. Skill, as a starting point, is also the common denominator in *Disrupted Realism*. If you don’t have skill to start with, there is nothing to disrupt.

A new generation of artists, trained by the renegade realists of the Slade School, in ateliers and in other realist enclaves across the globe, evidently has skill to burn. They understand that representational painting supported by the scaffolding of traditional realism is once again a field open for exploration. Painting allows them to deflect, hybridize, and transform images as they search for associations, memories, or transitory meanings. Francis Bacon once said that his paintings were blurred because his memories were blurred, and that kind of inclination to blur to suggest emotions and memories is a prerogative of the artists of *Disrupted Realism*. The flexibility of paint itself, energized by the touch of the artist’s brush, allows them to channel the manic energy and evanescence of contemporary experience directly into their imagery.

In a time of rapid change and vast uncertainty *Disrupted Realism* stands as a metaphor for contemporary experience across the globe and across culture. The world outside us moves faster and faster, offering less and less coherence as we are engulfed by a tsunami of mechanical images that we mainly glimpse while multi-tasking. But inside, we remain human, questioning, remembering and doing what we can to make sense of our feelings and experiences. We yearn for deep feelings and inner truths that no mimetic image, painted or photographed, can capture.

- John Seed

About the Curator

John Seed is an artist, writer and curator who recently retired after teaching art and art history at Mt. San Jacinto College for more than thirty-one years. He currently serves as an instructor in Theory and Criticism for the MFA Painting program at Laguna College of Art and Design and is a board member of the Sam Francis Foundation.

Seed Holds a BA with Distinction in Studio Art from Stanford University (1979) and an MA in Studio Art from UC Berkeley (1981). Shaped by his studies with leading Bay Area Figurative artists, including Nathan Oliveira, Joan Brown and Elmer Bischoff, Seed has an ongoing interest in the intersection of representation and abstraction. Seed has written about art and artists for Arts of Asia, Art LTD, Catamaran, Harvard Magazine, The Huffington Post and Hyperallergic.com and was the recipient of a 2001 Society of Professional Journalists Award in arts and entertainment writing.



John Seed with Kyle Staver's "*Biker Triptych*" at Santa Clara University (photo credit: Marie Cameron)

Exhibiting Artists

	Page
Alex Kanevsky	10 - 11
Anne Harris	12 - 15
Bruce Samuelson	16 - 19
Catherine Kehoe	20
Daniel Ochoa	21
James Bland	22
Justin Bower	23 - 25
Justin Duffus	26 - 29
Kai Samuels-Davis	30
Lou Ros	31
Nicolas V. Sanchez	32 - 35
Radu Belcin	36 - 38
Robert Birmelin	39 - 41
Stanka Kordic	42 - 44
Stephanie Pierce	45
Valerio D'Ospina	46

Alex Kanevsky



Alex Kanevsky

Alex Kanevsky is a painterly risk-taker whose paintings are full of slippery and satisfying disjunctions. His best work has a sense of immense skill lurking beneath a luxurious incoherence. In a 2012 interview with Neil Plotkin, Kanevsky stated: "I always want to function at the edge of my current abilities to keep things exciting. There should always be a danger of the painting crashing and burning."



C.G. & J.F.H., 2015 oil on panel 36 x 36 inches

Anne Harris







Anne Harris

Since the "invisibles" of artist Anne Harris are rooted in self-portraiture, they begin with self-inspection and then move forward into an ethereal realm of improvisation and invention. Harris's spectral figures loom in an atmosphere of temporality, assuming the weightlessness of imagined bodies. As Harris explains: "The figure might have less weight than the air; I love trying to paint dense air. The entire painting becomes the body. It is exciting to me that everything is skin and air."



Bruce Samuelson

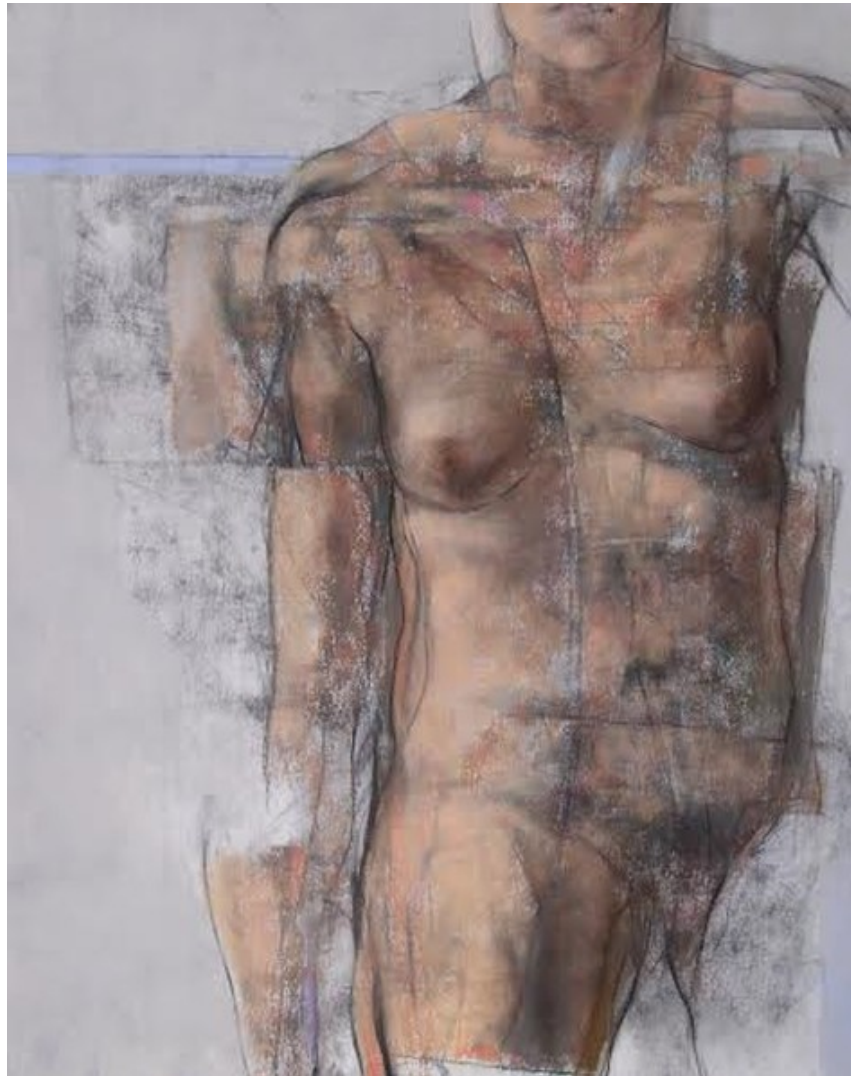






Bruce Samuelson

Bruce Samuelson's semi-abstract drawings of human figures suggest multiplicity, transformation and the artist's attempt to see the body a vehicle for artistic process. Employing multiple viewpoints, shifting silhouettes and blurred forms, Samuelson walks the tightrope between representation and abstraction. His process suggests an affinity with sculpture, generating forms that alternately morph into tangible form and disappear into illegibility.



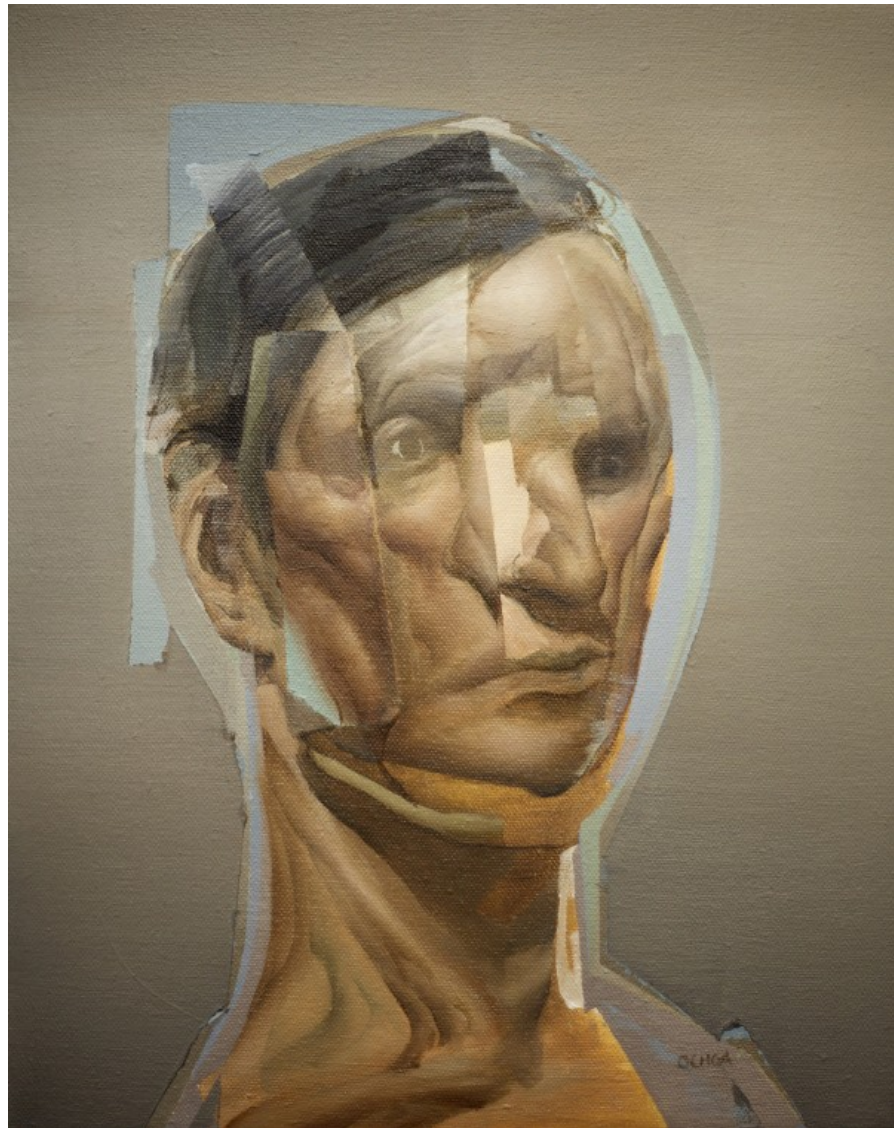
Catherine Kehoe's paintings - seen at a glance - are composed of relatively simple forms. Kehoe paints flat planes and zones that join at firm edges, generating a seemingly spare vocabulary of recognizable forms that overlay hints of dynamism and complexity. Activated by rhythmic overlaps and charged by shards of color that peek through surprising shapes, Kehoe's compositions weave positive and negative forms into concertos of light, color, and semi-abstracted imagery.

Catherine Kehoe



Daniel Ochoa

Shaped by the experience of growing up in a bicultural family, Daniel Ochoa creates works that narrate a consistently shifting sense of identity. Through layered hybridized paintings that reflect in the influence of digital and social media images, Ochoa generates complex and conflicting emotions in the form of challenging, vestigial portraits.



Self Portrait, 2017 oil on canvas 14 x 11 inches

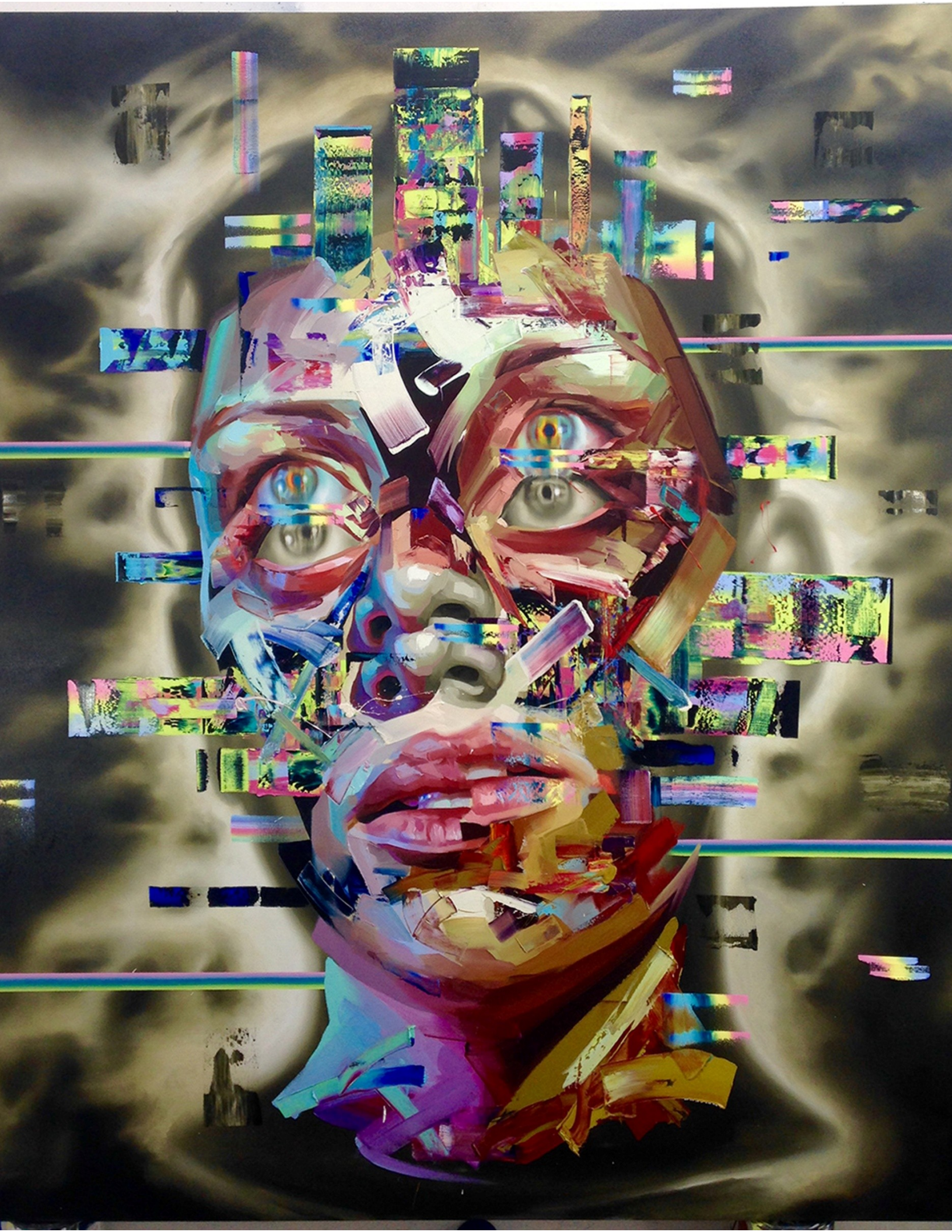
James Bland paints in a state of flux: he has an open-ended approach to painting that involves both observation and transformation. "I like that this process remains mysterious," Bland comments. "I don't illustrate stories or themes that have been decided upon a priori." Because he strives to stay off balance and surprise himself, Bland has developed into a highly responsive and individualistic artist whose works feature dynamic interchanges between form and brushwork.

James Bland



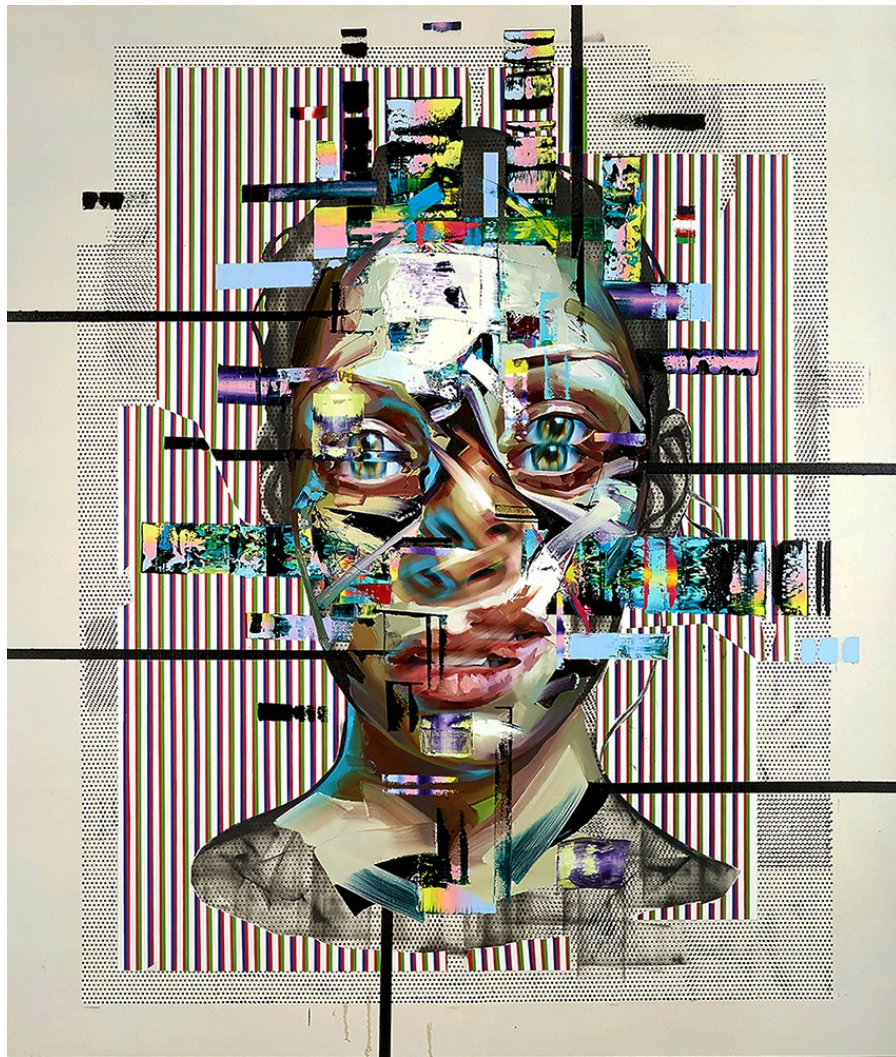
Justin Bower



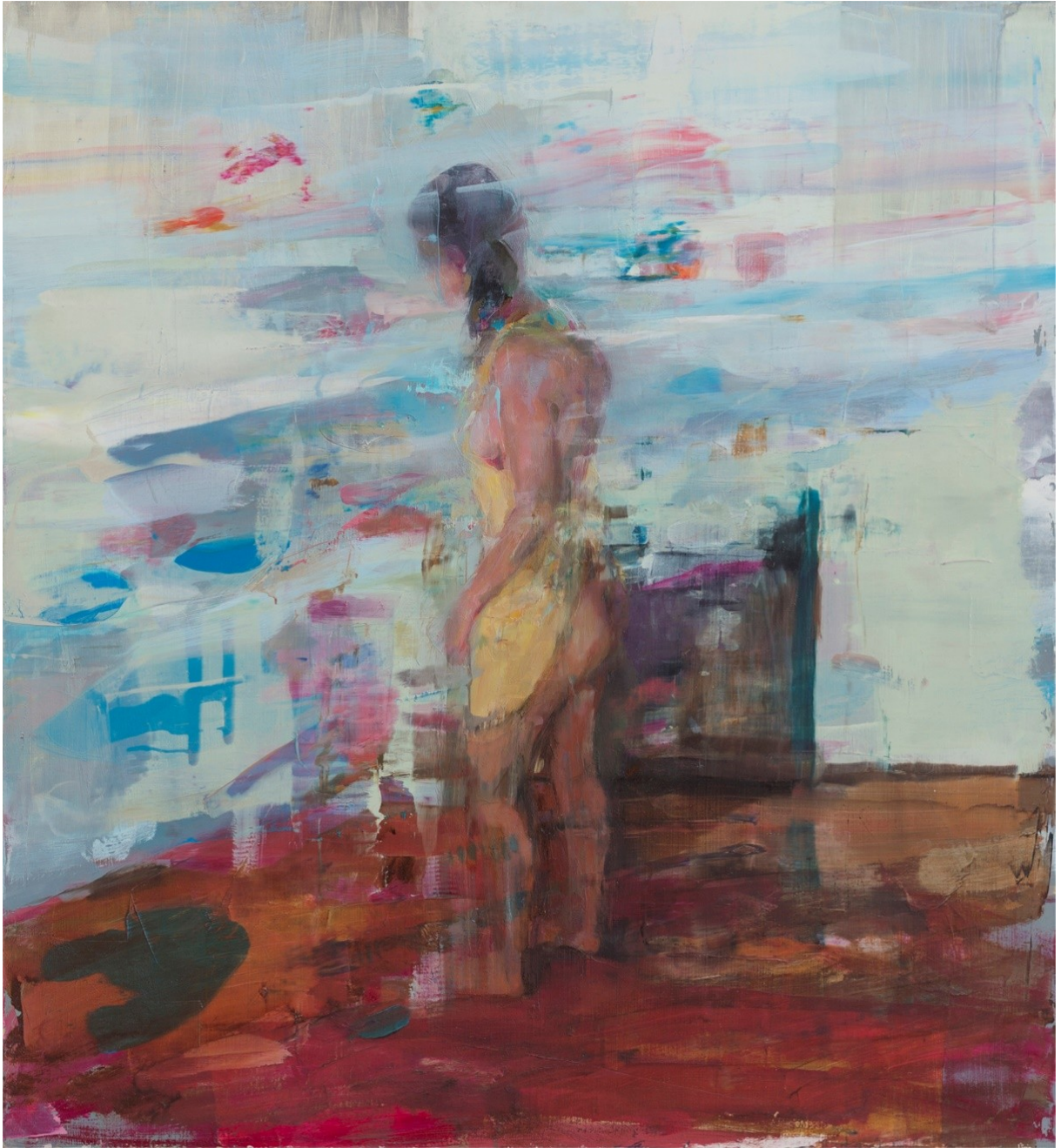


Justin Bower

There is a sense of digital disruption in the paintings of Justin Bower: it is hard to tell if people are transfixed and transformed by screens or, who are - in some sense - screens themselves. Jarring and lit by woven shards of RGB color, Bower presents to us a world somehow pierced and even infected by technology. The destabilization apparent in Bower's portraits has its genus in Cubism, which it reinvents for a contemporary technological context.



Justin Duffus







Justin Duffus

A painter of slippery glimpses, Justin Duffus has a knack for creating unsettling images that are the products of a vivid, restless imagination. Sometimes funny and sometimes weird, his canvases blend hints of the mundane with hints of mystery. His searching brushwork and flexible approach to imagery mark Duffus as a painter who can consistently hold our attention while subverting our expectations.



The portraits of Kai Samuels - Davis represent ambiguous, introspective figures that are the product of a searching, process-oriented approach to painting. Using both brushes and scrapers, Samuels-Davis might be described as a portraitist who works in reverse, moving his subjects toward abstraction. Solitary and spiritual, each painted figure presents itself as full of possibilities, yet somehow private. The role of the painter in each individual portrait is perhaps the only clearly defined presence.

Kai Samuels – Davis



Lou Ros

The portraits of Lou Ros present us with the figures that exist in the space between paint and reality. They are both knowable and just out of reach. Ros knows how to manipulate paint in such a way that he tells us just enough about his subjects, but not too much. Surrounded by marks and traces that indicate the process of painting, they open up mysteries and possibilities.



Nicolas V. Sanchez







Nicolas V. Sanchez

The paintings of Nicolas V. Sanchez, which are rooted in his experience of living between cultures, are personal narratives that raise questions about identity. His figures suggest the many layers of experience and understanding that he has navigated as a Mexican-American, and rely on subtle cues and formations to trigger memories and associations. As Sanchez explores each image, he muses on the wider construct of those he identifies with and feels connected to.



Baby Tia, 2017 oil on panel 6 x 6 inches

Radu Belcin





There is an assertive strangeness present in the portraits of Radu Belcin. As the artist explains it, “In my work, I try to create a universe where any stander-by is taken out of the conventional reality and thrown in the middle of unexpected situations.” By generating disturbing and disruptive associations, Belcin moves what might otherwise be thought of as mundane images toward the supernatural and quasi-spiritual.

Radu Belcin



Robert Birmelin





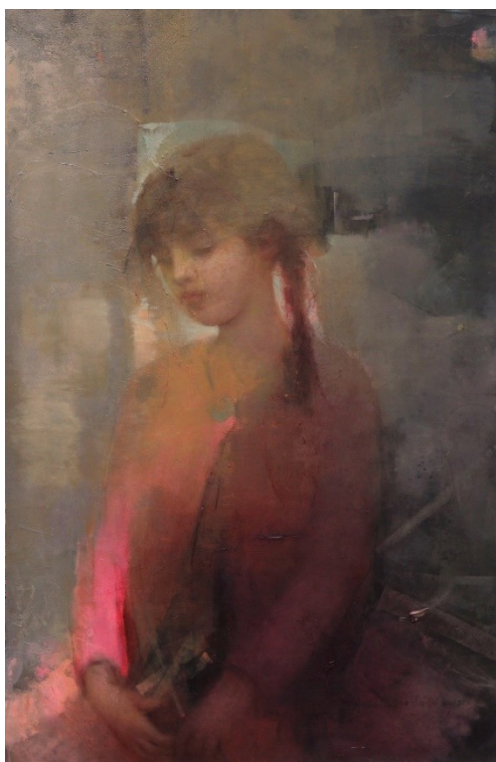
Robert Bermelin

The intensely imagined visions of Robert Birmelin capture the frenetic movement of the urban crowd. His artistic interest is in conveying the experiential uncertainties in the viewer; in his struggle to grasp the significance of the events happening in an overcharged visual environment. Within a realistic framework, variations of focus, fragmentation, transparencies and visual disruptions are instruments toward convincingly projecting the psychological state his paintings seek to embody.



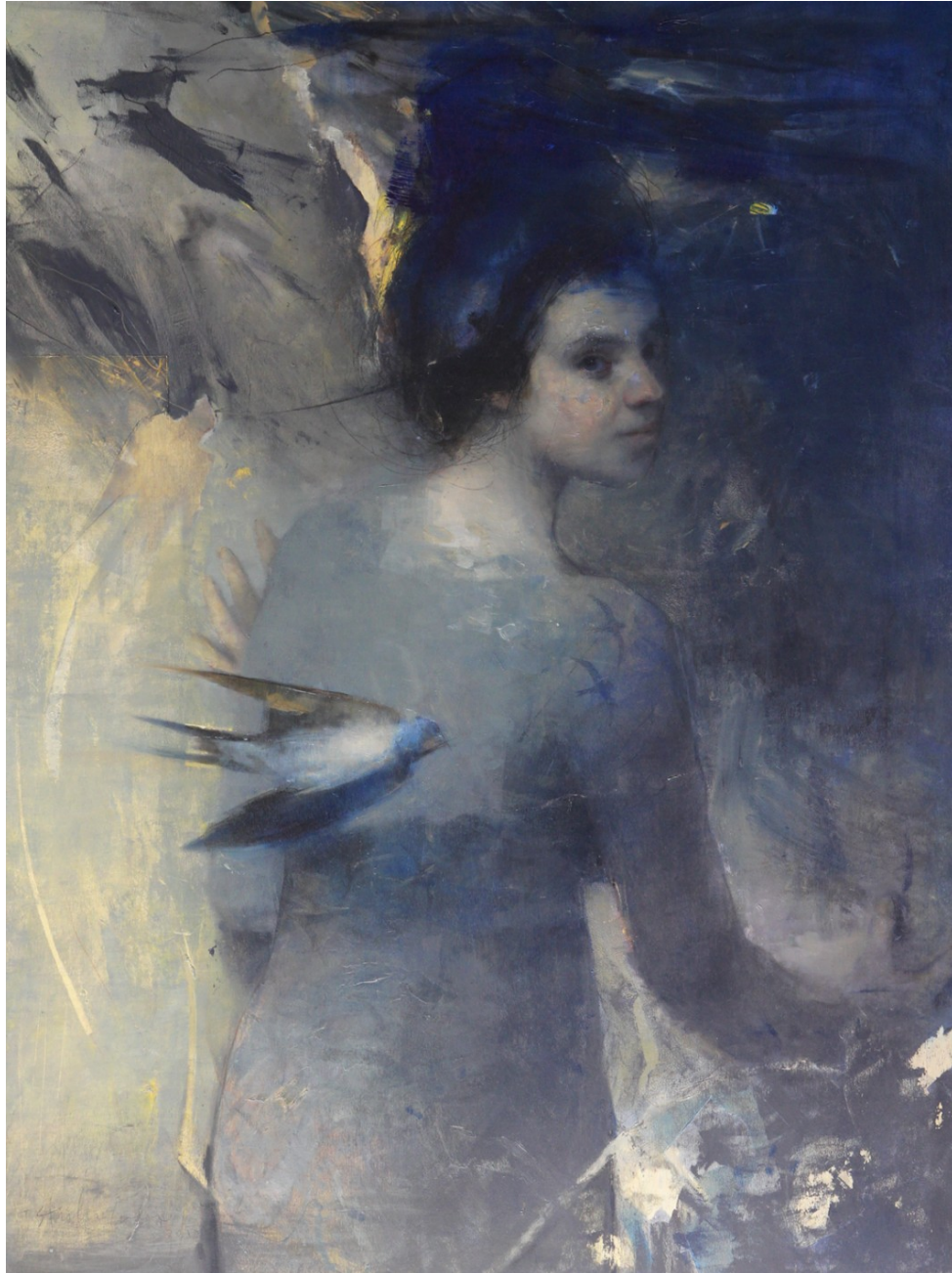
Stanka Kordic





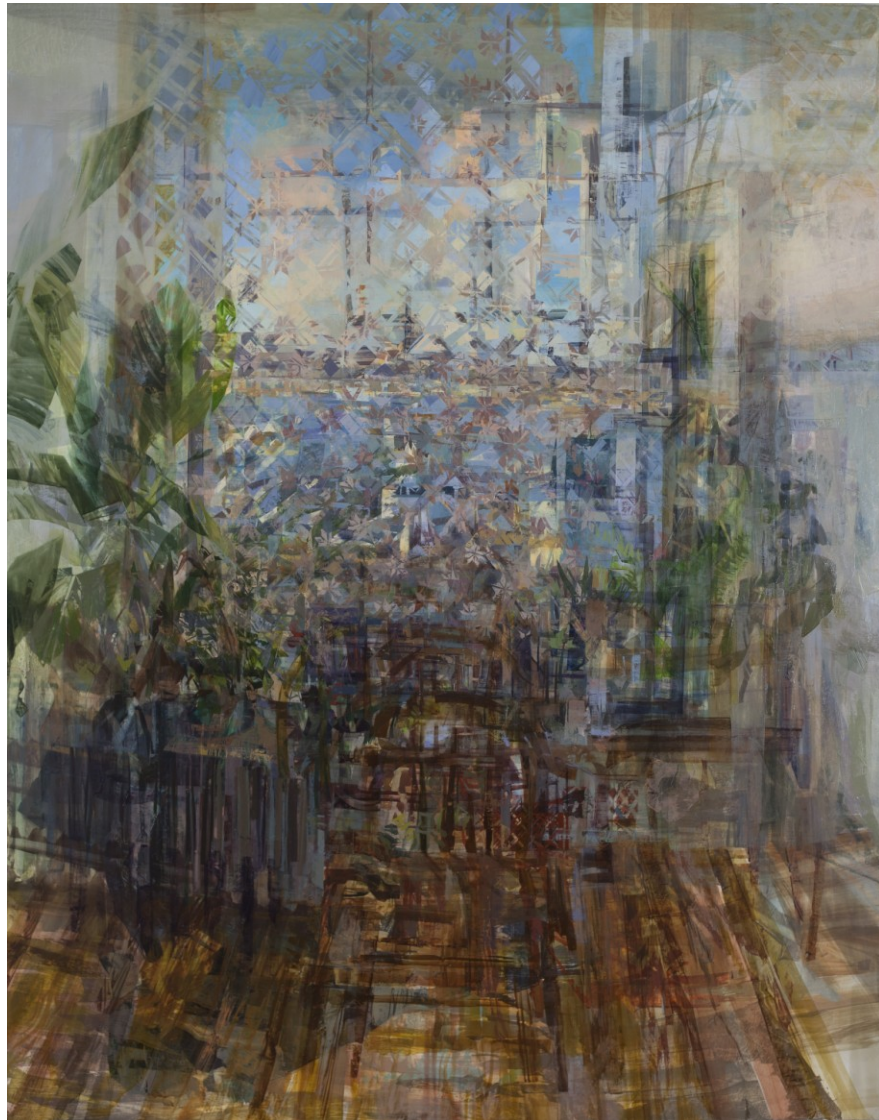
Stanka Kordic evokes a world of fragility and sentiment. Kordic's artistic process, which is centered around her affinity for the undiscovered, is sensitive to mystery, memory, and narrative. Figures varnish, coalesce and layer themselves into painted environments that seem to both sustain and corrode them. Kordic's resonant images are often unforgettable and just a bit uncomfortable.

Stanka Kordic



Stephanie Pierce

Stephanie Pierce sees her paintings as explorations of light, time, perception and how reality can be represented as it is reconsidered over time. By layering screens and scrims of imagery against each other, Pierce creates zones that work with and against each other. Fascinated by the possibilities of things that are at once material and immaterial, Pierce fashions deeply engaging canvases that elicit slow inspection and reward with their subtleties.



Voyager, 2016 oil on linen 64 x 50 inches

By giving Gericault's Raft of the Medusa a blast of perspectival velocity, Valerio D'Ospina revitalizes and transforms our understanding of the original painting. In his skilled hands, the raft of the survivors becomes something else: a carrier of memories and a metaphor for history and experience. The diagonal energy of D'Ospina's brushwork challenges our ability to see an iconic image with fresh eyes and a mind re-opened to its contemporary implications.

Valerio D'Ospina



Hopeless (after Gericault), 2014 oil on linen 54 x 74 inches

Acknowledgments

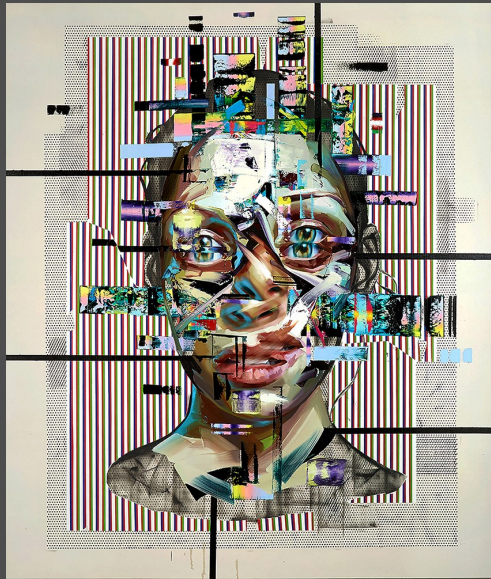
John Seed would like to thank and acknowledge the ideas of his friend and colleague F. Scott Hess, whose 2013 lecture on "Discombobulation" stimulated his interest in disrupted art. He would also like to thank Katherine Stanek, Alex Kanevsky, Vanessa Werring and Deborah Fine for their ideas and support.

front cover: *C.G. & J.F.H.* by Alex Kanevsky, 2015 oil on panel

back cover: *Ontological Hygiene* by Justin Bower, 2015 oil on canvas

© 2018 Stanek Gallery ▪ All Rights Reserved

The copyrights of artwork contained within this catalog are retained by the artists. Reproductions or any published material (images or text) is prohibited without the written permission of Stanek Gallery.



Stanek Gallery

242 North 3rd Street • Philadelphia • PA • 19106
215-908-3277

www.stanekgallery.com